

**Opening Statement
By Chairman Chris Smith
House Subcommittee on Africa,
Global Human Rights and International Operations**

“Angola’s Long-Delayed Election”

July 20, 2006

Good Afternoon. While international attention in the region of southern Africa often focuses on the HIV-AIDS pandemic or the blatantly undemocratic tactics of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, less attention is directed towards the institutionalization of democracy in Angola in the run-up to its long-awaited national elections, targeted to be held in September 2006.

Yet the outcome of this election is important not only for Angola itself and for the region, but also for the United States. Angola is one of the world’s largest diamond producers and its Okavango river basin provides valuable water to Namibia and Botswana. It is the second biggest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa, and in May 2006, Angola exported 356 thousand barrels per day to the United States, making it one of the US’ top 10 oil importers.

During the 1970s, Angola was engaged in 14-year armed struggle for freedom from Portugal, the colonial power. The Portuguese gave up control of Angola in November 1975, but they did not resolve the question of who would form the government in Angola before leaving. As a result, three liberation movements fought for control of the country for two years until the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, or MPLA, took control of the government in 1977.

However, the civil war, which began in the months before independence and was fueled by superpower Cold War competition, raged on. There were a few cease-fire agreements over the next decade, but it wasn't until the Bicesse Accords signed in May 1991 that peace was sufficiently established to allow Angola to hold its first-ever elections – scheduled for September 1992.

There were numerous obstacles along the way to those elections. Uncertain disarmament of soldiers, problematic exchanges of prisoners, discoveries of hidden weapons, assassinations of political party officials and other crises threatened to derail Angola's elections, but the process continued to move forward. Not even a brief controversy over an early end to registration of voters in opposition areas could derail the process.

So on September 29th and 30th 1999, Angola's first elections were held. President José Eduardo dos Santos won slightly less than 50% of the vote, while opposition leader Jonas Savimbi won 40%. The MPLA won 129 seats in the 220-seat National Assembly and Savimbi's National Union for the total Independence of Angola, or UNITA, won 77 seats.

Savimbi had expected to win the election and seemed unprepared to accept defeat. However, Margaret Anstee, the United Nations Special Representative in Angola declared the elections she helped oversee to be essentially free and fair, despite irregularities. In the post-election wrangling, an agreement was reached to hold the required Presidential election run-off, since no candidate won a majority of the vote. Unfortunately, the hostile rhetoric continued to escalate and warfare restarted just as Angola appeared ready to emerge from its long history of conflict.

The renewed warfare stopped and started, but didn't finally end until the death of Savimbi in a shoot-out with government troops in

February 2002. Since then, Angola has moved toward its long-delayed elections – again in fits and starts.

Two years ago, the Government of Angola set September 2006 as the target time-frame for elections. Among the electoral assistance Angola will be receiving in preparation for the elections is technical assistance from three American organizations: the International Foundation for Electoral Assistance, which is represented at our hearing today by its President, Richard Soudriette; the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute.

The purpose of today's hearing is to allow Congress to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by the Angolan government, the ruling party and the political opposition. If our government is to be of assistance in preparing for these important elections, we need to know exactly what remains to be done and how we can help make the next elections an effective means for the Angolan people to express their political will.

According to the current State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices, the right of Angolan citizens to change their government at all levels has been compromised, largely due to the continued delay in holding elections, but also because of other issues. Angolan law provides for freedom of speech and assembly, but in practice, both rights have been restricted by the government.

Moreover, opposition parties have reported acts of political intolerance by supporters of the MPLA. There were reports in March of last year that supporters of the Social Renovation Party were chased out of two municipalities in Moxico Province, and a few weeks later, MPLA activists reportedly burned down eight homes of UNITA supporters. Since then, MPLA and opposition parties met to discuss issues related to the election, including acts

of harassment. We will learn from our witnesses today whether those talks have resolved these problems.

There are some positive signs that this election may succeed. Among them are the passage of an electoral law by the National Assembly and the establishment of a national electoral commission. I regret that its chairman Dr. Caetano de Sousa, was unable to be with us today, but he said it was critical for him to continue working on the electoral schedule.

Congress was once divided between supporters of the MPLA and supporters of UNITA. Today, we are united in our interest in helping one of our major suppliers of oil to enjoy the lasting benefits of peace and to achieve the kind of economic development this nation, with so many natural and human resources, deserves after so many decades of war and suffering.